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Committee on General Welfare

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“Oversight—Foster Care Task Force Progress”

Good afternoon, Chair Levin, and members of the City Council Committee on General Welfare. I am Julie Farber, the Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Family Permanency Services (FPS) at the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS). With me today are Michael Moiseyev, Deputy Commissioner of the ACS Division of Financial Services, and my colleagues in FPS, Ina Mendez, Associate Commissioner, Office of Strategic Program Support, and Yuriy Pawluk, Associate Commissioner and Ray Singleton, Assistant Commissioner, both in the Office of Education and Employment Initiatives. Also with us is Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social Services.

We are pleased to be here to reflect on the important and successful work of the Interagency Foster Care Task Force (Task Force) and to talk about ACS's efforts to strengthen our foster care system going forward. I first want to thank Council Member, and General Welfare Chair, Stephen Levin, for authoring the bill that created the Task Force. The Interagency Task Force was created following the enactment of Local Law 144 of 2016, which was signed into law by Mayor de Blasio on November 6, 2016.

The law established the composition of the Task Force to include a range of perspectives, experience and expertise. The Task Force was chaired by the Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Its designated members included youth currently and previously in foster care; parents; advocates; representatives from foster care agencies; the Public Advocate; the Speaker of the City Council; the Chair of the City Council General Welfare Committee; the Commissioners of the City Departments of Social Services (DSS), Youth and Community Development

(DYCD), and Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH); the Chancellor of the Department of Education (DOE) and the Chair of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).

The legislation charged the Task Force with issuing recommendations to improve services and outcomes for youth in and aging out of foster care. In addition to issuing a report on the recommendations, the Task Force was required to produce two follow-up reports on the implementation of the Recommendations, at which time the law sunset. The Task Force's initial report was released in March 2018 and included sixteen recommendations to improve services and outcomes for youth in and aging out of foster care. All Task Force recommendations were incorporated into the ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint. ACS issued the one-year Progress report in March 2019, and the final two-year progress report in March 2020.

Our sister agencies in City government, parents, youth, advocates and provider agencies have been incredible partners with ACS in implementing the recommendations. I am truly grateful for the shared expertise and collaboration that has been instrumental in moving our work forward. While the Task Force concluded its work following the submission of its third and final report in March 2020 (in the attached appendix and linked below¹), we appreciate the opportunity today to both highlight the many accomplishments of the Task Force, and to discuss the ways we are further advancing the important Task Force recommendations, which are incorporated in ACS's Foster Care Strategic Blueprint.

Specifically, I will focus today on the progress we made in the three domains included in the Foster Care Task Force's work: 1) Improving Permanency Outcomes, 2) Improving Health, Mental Health, and Education Services for Children in Foster Care,

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/testimony/2020/taskforcemarch2020.pdf>

and 3) Improving Prospects for Young Adults Leaving Foster Care. As you will hear, we have continued to focus our efforts on ensuring that children and youth in foster care, and their families, have what they need to flourish, even as we continue to adapt our work to address health and safety throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Improving Permanency Outcomes

Permanency is a top priority and the Task Force made several recommendations designed to reduce the time that children spend in foster care. ACS's mission—across all of our program areas—is to promote child safety while supporting and strengthening families. There were nearly 50,000 New York City children in foster care 25 years ago, and 17,000 just a decade ago. Today we have under 8,000 children in foster care, as a result of investments in our nationally recognized continuum of prevention services that keep NYC children safe and supported at home with their families. Through our ongoing efforts in NYC, temporary foster care placement is an increasingly rare child protective intervention, and it is used as a last resort only if there are no alternate safety plans available to keep children at home safely. We have also made important progress reducing the time children spend in foster care: Chapin Hall, an independent national child welfare expert, conducted an evaluation of ACS's Title IV-E waiver program and found that through the waiver interventions such as reduced foster care caseloads and therapeutic supports for parents of young children, median length of stay in foster care decreased by 9 percent (an average of 50 days per child). Despite the federal waiver ending, ACS has maintained these key components of the Title IV-E waiver through federal transition funds.

ACS contracts with and oversees 26 non-profit foster care agencies that provide foster care services for New York City children and their families. For those children for whom foster care is a necessary safety intervention, our goal is to reunify children with their families as soon as possible. Reunification is the permanency outcome for the vast majority of children who enter foster care. When reunification is not safely possible, ACS and our providers work to achieve permanent families for children through adoption or kinship guardianship.

One key area addressed by the Task Force was enhancing our practices to increase placing children with “kinship” resources, such as relatives or family friends, whenever children need to come into foster care. National research shows that children in foster care fare best when placed with a kinship resource, and this can help reduce trauma, preserve community connections, increase placement stability and improve emotional well-being. It also increases the overall likelihood of achieving permanency and reduces the risk of re-entry to foster care after exiting.

During the last 3 years, ACS has successfully increased the proportion of children in foster care placed with kin from 31% to 41%. And even during the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen this percentage increase further to 41.6%. We achieved this important increase through a range of strategies. We created dedicated Kinship Specialists, in our Division of Child Protection offices, who are focused on finding and engaging kinship caregivers for children entering foster care. We also launched a “Find Family and Friends First” campaign with training and education materials to help our frontline child protective staff prioritize this important effort.

With an FY2020 investment from the City, we procured Binti, a software that will make the foster home certification process digital, making it more user-friendly and reducing paperwork for both foster parents and foster care agency staff. Binti has been working with the provider agencies to customize forms and workflows for each agency, and we are implementing a phased pilot, starting with 9 agencies this winter. In the coming months, we look forward to making the online applicant portal available to foster families and enabling all foster care agencies to utilize the Binti software to enhance their tracking and certification processes.

Supported by City investments in FY2019 and FY2020, we were also able to provide four foster care agencies with funding to launch pilots aimed at increasing kinship placements. The agencies implemented innovative strategies, such as including kinship caregivers and staff in a joint training to understand each other's roles and perspectives; hosting virtual support groups for kinship caregivers; collaborating with CityMD to make medical clearances easier; and having staff dedicated to supporting kinship caregivers. Since the kinship pilots have ended, we have shared the lessons learned with other foster care providers so they can incorporate the successful strategies into practice too.

The Task Force also identified increasing the quality and quantity of family time (a.k.a. visiting between children in foster care with their parents) as a key strategy to improve permanency outcomes. ACS implemented two new tools with foster care agencies to help encourage positive family experiences during Family Time and to aid decision-making around child safety and progression of visits, both with the goal of achieving more timely reunifications. The first tool helps agencies assess family

readiness to move from supervised to unsupervised visits. The second tool is a Family Time Space Assessment Tool to help evaluate and improve the quality of their visiting areas. Prior to the pandemic, ACS expanded its visiting program at Riker's Island and released a video, in conjunction with the Osborne Association, to promote family time for children of incarcerated parents. To improve family time for children with parents living in shelter, in May 2018, ACS issued and implemented guidance to foster care provider agencies regarding appropriate visiting locations, with instructions for requesting ACS approval and payment for alternative visiting locations when parents lack appropriate housing. Supported by City investments in FY2019 and FY2020, ACS and four foster care agencies piloted additional Family Time improvement strategies, including visit coaching, case aides accompanying families on visits outside the agency, identifying offsite visiting spaces and providing kits with supplies to encourage positive family interactions. We gathered key takeaways from these pilots about enhancing Family Time that we have shared and encourage all foster care agencies to use, such as: holding more visits outside agency walls, and considering supervision by safe kinship resources; dedicating staff to begin coordinating visits from the moment the agency is assigned a new case; offering food and activities as a way to encourage high-quality visits as well as positive interactions between parents and foster parents; using technology to include parents in everyday activities such as bedtime stories; offering visit coaching to help families overcome obstacles to reunification; and facilitating virtual parenting skill-building and support groups.

Our work with the Task Force contributed to stronger relationships with parent advocacy organizations and additional strategies to enhance parent voice throughout

ACS's programs, planning, and policy. We created the new role of Parent Engagement Specialist in 2019, to increase the voice of parents with lived experiences in all aspects of ACS's work, including family permanency. Our Parent Engagement Specialist, Sabra Jackson, supports the Parent Advisory Council, which regularly meets, shares recommendations and engages in difficult and challenging conversations with ACS leadership, including Commissioner Hansell, myself and others, to hold us accountable and strengthen our work with families. We also collaborated with the parent advocacy organization Rise to develop tools and resources to support quality Family Time and to create a training curriculum for foster care agencies to focus on strengthening relationships between parents and foster parents, which helps all of the adults in a child's life work together to provide a safe, stable environment and move more quickly towards permanency. Parents with lived experiences in child welfare have been generous and forthright in sharing their stories and calling us to action to continually improve our support for other parents, and we are truly grateful for their leadership. With input from parents, parent advocates, legal advocates and other key stakeholders, ACS is currently updating two documents—the "Parent's Guide to Child Protective Services" and the "Handbook for Parents with Children in Foster Care." While the finalization of these documents was temporarily delayed, we will soon be sharing the documents with the Parent Advisory Council for their feedback and plan to finalize and issue these documents as soon as possible. We remain committed to ensuring that parents receive relevant and informative materials to help them understand what to expect during a child protective investigation or when a child is placed into foster care, and the ways to access more help throughout their involvement with ACS or foster care.

The Task Force permanency initiatives are incorporated into the ongoing priorities that we are aggressively implementing through the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint. Through our Home Away from Home initiative, we remain focused on efforts to increase kinship placements, foster home recruitment, and support for foster parents. We are continuing our focus on kinship care, and we have implemented a range of strategies that successfully increased new foster parent recruitment by 50% from FY 2017 to FY 2019. We achieved this by focusing on strategies that leverage current foster parents as credible messengers to recruit other foster parents. We also built better supports for kinship and non-kinship foster parents, including a focus connecting foster parents to each other as key peer supports. ACS continues to provide data and intensive technical assistance to the foster care agencies to help them analyze and enhance business processes and implement best practices to improve kinship placement and support.

Parent voice remains at the forefront of our activities, and we recently announced an exciting new parent advocate initiative called “Parents Supporting Parents,” to improve reunification and race equity outcomes. In the initial pilot, two foster care agencies will be staffed with a total of 9 parent advocates who have lived experience with the system, and who will receive training and support from Rise and become central members of the case planning team, working with parents to achieve reunification. These parent advocates will be crucial allies to empower parents and help dismantle bias and oppression in the foster care system, by bringing their lived experience to strengthen parents’ self-advocacy and voice within the process, and help agencies shift their organizational culture to more authentic parent engagement

approaches. ACS has raised funds from major national and local foundations to launch a pilot that we hope will lay the groundwork for full implementation, with a parent advocate assigned to every parent with a goal of reunification across the foster care case system.

Improving Health, Mental Health, and Education Services for Children in Foster Care

Seven of the Task Force's recommendations were designed to improve the well-being and educational attainment of children while in foster care. Research consistently shows that children in foster care who are highly mobile are at a significant educational disadvantage, including that they may experience higher school absence rates, have a greater likelihood of trauma-induced behavioral challenges, and face difficulty in developing and sustaining supportive relationships with teachers and counselors, a key ingredient in resilience and overall well-being. Youth in foster care have also experienced trauma that can affect their physical and mental health, leading to further challenges such as placement instability or difficulty in school. Children in foster care, and the families supporting them, need ready access to a variety of trauma-informed healthcare services in order to achieve more positive outcomes. ACS and our partners have implemented the Task Force's Recommendations that focused on the core educational, health, and mental health needs of youth in care, resulting in enhanced service access and coordination among service providers and our sister agencies for the benefit of youth in care.

Thanks to strong, coordinated efforts among child welfare and other nonprofit agencies, foundations, advocates, and inspirational young people who comprise the

Fair Futures Coalition, and with dedicated support from Chair Levin to urge the City's investments, we successfully launched Fair Futures, a combination of two Task Force Recommendations, to improve education, employment, housing and permanency outcomes for youth in foster care, by providing youth with coaches, tutors and other supports.

New York City is the first jurisdiction in the nation to implement an initiative for youth in foster care of this breadth and scale, which provides dedicated coaches, tutors and educational, employment and housing specialists who work with youth in foster care ages 11-21 to help achieve their goals. The initiative started as a seven-month pilot in FY2020, and for FY2021, ACS received a \$2.7 million investment at budget adoption. With state matching funds, as well as one-time additional revenue in the ACS budget, ACS has been able to provide \$12 million in total to the foster care providers to continue Fair Futures this fiscal year.

Through Fair Futures, our goal is to help youth prepare for major transitions, including the transitions between elementary school, middle school, and high school, as well as the transition from high school to college, vocational training, and/or a fulfilling career. Most importantly, through Fair Futures, we support young people in the achievement of key milestones that put them on a path to success after they leave foster care to permanency or independent living. We are thrilled to hear from young people who are finding the program beneficial, as they receive support and build confidence and life-long skills to become strong advocates for themselves and their needs.

The Task Force identified educational outcomes as critical to the well-being and future success of children and youth in foster care. As recommended by the Task Force, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) released comprehensive guidance on the rights of students in foster care and added a webpage on foster care to its online resource hub.² DOE hired approximately 100 school-based Community Coordinators to connect young people, including students in foster care, to a range of supportive services. Youth in foster care with attendance challenges continue to benefit from access to DOE Success Mentors, caring adults who identify the underlying causes of chronic student absenteeism and address barriers to attendance to ensure that students reach their academic potential. ACS regularly works with the DOE to navigate any individual educational challenges and to help children in foster care establish and maintain strong educational connections and supports. Prior to the pandemic, the Task Force's collaboration led to an increase in the number of middle school children in foster care enrolled in the Department of Youth and Community Development's after-school programs. With the pandemic, ACS has been collaborating with DYCD and DOE to ensure children in foster care who are in need of support on days they are learning remotely, are enrolled in Learning Bridges.

The Task Force also focused on health and mental health, where we have made significant progress in strengthening the health and mental health supports for children and youth in foster care. We worked across city and state systems to enhance access to programs like Nurse-Family Partnership for youth in care who are first-time parents; Home and Community Based Waiver Services for youth transitioning out of care who have significant physical or mental health care needs or developmental disabilities; and

² <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/special-situations/students-in-foster-care>

crisis and behavioral health support services (Children and Family Treatment Support Services, or CFTSS) through the ongoing state Medicaid redesign. We continue to collaborate with our partners and refer youth in foster care to these important programs.

Children and youth in foster care also continue to benefit from trauma-informed mental health supports that ACS originally implemented as part of our federal Title IV-E waiver. This includes our efforts to improve foster children's access to appropriate, evidence-based mental health interventions, and improving communication and collaborative treatment planning between child welfare and mental health services. We have also expanded access to Attachment and Bio-behavioral Catchup (ABC) services for parenting youth in foster care who live in congregate settings, including mother/child group homes. ABC's dyadic services coach new parents to practice nurturing, responsive caregiving behaviors that promote healthy development and improved attachment for infants and toddlers.

One key area of progress that the Task Force advanced and that we are especially pleased to highlight is in accessing the New York State Office of Mental Health's web-based application, PSYCKES (Psychiatric Services and Clinical Knowledge Enhancement System), which provides Medicaid data regarding the health and behavioral health diagnoses and treatments. By providing ACS with access to this system, it will enhance quality improvement, care planning, and clinical decision-making for individuals receiving behavioral health services through Medicaid, including children in foster care who are receiving these services. After intensive coordination with the State OMH and Office of Children and Family Services to ensure all legal requirements are met and there are strong data privacy procedures in place, ACS now has access to

individual child-level information from PSYCKES. We are now working to build out internal capacity to implement access to this individual child-level information for the clinical, medical, and nursing staff in our health and mental health offices, who work directly with and/or support care for youth in foster care. The next step is working together with OMH, DOITT and our IT and analytic team to produce aggregate data reports, which we anticipate will be completed this winter.

Improving Prospects for Young Adults Leaving Foster Care

While most children and youth in foster care return home, are adopted, or achieve permanency through subsidized kinship guardianship, every young person's situation includes its own unique circumstances and challenges. In Calendar Year 2019, approximately 600 youth transitioned from foster care to independent living. Regardless of permanency outcome, ACS is committed to providing older youth in care with the necessary services and supports to acquire the skills to live a healthy, productive and self-sufficient adult life, and we welcomed the Task Force's focus on this important goal.

Housing stability for youth leaving foster care is a top priority for ACS, and one the Task Force also focused on. ACS will not discharge any youth from foster care if they do not have a safe, stable living arrangement in place. Even once a youth reaches age 21, which is the legal age limit for foster care reimbursement in New York State (and nationally), ACS has an established procedure to provide continued care and support through City funds for the foster youth and maintain them in their current foster care placement when needed.

The Task Force made significant strides to increasing overall housing access for foster youth, with a workgroup focused on expanding access to key housing resources

for foster youth, and we achieved concrete progress in this area. As I previously discussed, ACS was excited to launch Fair Futures to help support youth prepare for important life transitions, and this includes additional housing search supports. We also worked with our partners at New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to ensure that ACS-referred youth could all receive the highest housing priority (N-zero priority), regardless of whether the youth resided in a foster home or residential facility within the five boroughs, a neighboring county, or was attending college outside of NYC. The Task Force recommended city advocacy to increase the housing assistance that is provided to foster youth and child welfare-involved families at that state-level, and ACS joined the advocacy effort that led to the enactment of a state law change regarding the child welfare housing subsidy. The legislative change makes it clear that the housing subsidy can be used in living arrangements where the beneficiary has roommates, as many youth and families do. Additionally, we partnered with NYC Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to secure federal Housing Choice Vouchers through the Family Unification Program, and to-date, 85 of these vouchers have been awarded. Through the City's 15/15 Supportive Housing Initiative, ACS is also able to refer single youth and pregnant or parenting young adults to this critical supportive housing resource.

The Task Force also focused on supporting youth to achieve their employment and post-secondary education goals. This work is centralized within ACS's Office of Education and Employment Initiatives, in our Division of Family Permanency Services, and it is continuing with urgency even during this difficult time. The Office regularly partners with the Department of Youth and Community Development to connect youth with the Advance and Earn paid internship program, as well as available Summer Youth

Employment Program opportunities. This past summer, several hundred older and younger youth in foster care participated in SYEP Summer Bridge, a career exploration and skill building program sponsored by DYCD. To help address the need to connect youth with jobs in light of the pandemic, ACS held its first ever virtual Youth Career Fair in Spring 2020, which connected more than 100 youth with paid employment opportunities.

ACS also leverages public-private partnerships to support hundreds of youth in foster care to achieve their education and workforce goals. We have launched numerous initiatives including the YV LifeSet program in partnership with New Yorkers for Children and Youth Villages to promote successful transitions to adulthood; our mentored internship program that has served nearly 400 youth across 12 agencies in partnership with the Pinkerton Foundation; and the YA WORC (Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers) model that we have implemented across ten foster care agencies with support and training from the Workplace Center at Columbia University. We were thrilled to offer a paid “Virtual Summer Internship Program” for 100 youth ages 18-24 through a grant from the Robin Hood Foundation in partnership with New Yorkers for Children in Summer 2020. During the six-week program, which was conducted entirely online, youth gained valuable work experience by being paired with supervisors from ACS, New Yorkers for Children, and foster care agencies. Participants also benefited from skills training, educational workshops, and other career-related activities. Support from the Robin Hood Foundation likewise enabled ACS, for the first time ever, to launch a virtual Fall Internship Program for 100 youth last month. Based on the success of the summer program, it provides work experience, training, and career-

related activities. The Virtual Fall Internship program is targeted toward two cohorts of youth: those in college ages 18-24, and also youth ages 16-24 who are neither employed nor attending school, for whom the program also includes support for the youth to enhance their literacy skills and obtain their HSE diplomas.

The Fostering College Success Initiative (FCSI, also known as the “Dorm Project”), which ACS established in partnership with CUNY and the New York Foundling, continues to provide year-round financial, academic and socio-emotional support for foster youth in college. When CUNY announced that all dorms other than at Queens College would be closing in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACS worked closely with the foster care agencies and students to safely house all students who needed to relocate. During this challenging time, we continued to support youth, including by continuing to provide stipends, tutoring, career counseling, coaching and other supports.

Recently, CUNY informed ACS that a new dorm at Hunter College would be made available to youth in foster care. In addition, CUNY made additional slots available at the existing Queens College dorm. As such, there are now dorm rooms available for all dorm project students who were displaced during the pandemic, as well as new students joining the program.

Through theme-based workshops, individualized coaching sessions, tutoring, and career advising, New York Foundling ensures that students remain engaged and committed to their academic success. Students enrolled this semester are currently studying for midterms and meeting with advisors to assess their current course load and register for the spring semester. The program also added a career counseling program

this fall for the first time. Through a dedicated team of counselors, FCSI students receive one-on-one career counseling, as well as participate in career development workshops.

Supporting Children and Families During the Pandemic

As the Task Force concluded its work in March 2020, we all simultaneously pivoted to face an unprecedented national crisis with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The foundations we established and the core values that we collectively embraced through the Task Force have been especially critical as ACS and our partners have worked to respond to this crisis. While the personal and professional challenges that all of us have faced have impacted our daily lives for the significant portion of this year, I am encouraged by the frontline heroism of foster care agency staff and foster parents, and continually in awe of the creativity, dedication, and caring that we have seen throughout this pandemic from all of our colleagues and partners.

During this difficult time, the comfort and support of family is essential. Kinship placements for children in foster care have remained strong throughout the pandemic, reaching 41.6% of children in foster care in recent months. We have consistently emphasized that visits and communication between children in foster care and their parents are essential to support the child's well-being, minimize trauma, and work towards reunification. ACS's emergency guidance instructs foster care agencies to carefully review and weigh child safety needs and the family's potential health risks when determining if contacts should be held in person or virtually. Furthermore, the guidance makes clear that agencies cannot have "blanket" visitation policies, but rather that decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis. Our guidance specifically directs

agencies to purchase technology for youth, families and staff to support virtual visits, if this is determined to be the best option for the family. Since the pandemic began, ACS has also hosted two webinars on how to best approach Family Time either in person or virtually.

With the Family Court's limited operations due to the pandemic, ACS has taken aggressive, proactive steps to safely progress cases toward reunification. We launched a review of the cases of almost 2,000 children in foster care with a goal of reunification to determine if these cases could move forward to increased visiting, trial discharge or final discharge. In cases that could move forward, we worked with the parent's attorney and children's attorney where necessary to sign stipulations and submitted these agreements to the court for approval. This process has helped to move reunification cases forward even without the Court holding hearings.

Given the Court's continued limited operations, we are currently launching another round of reviews of reunification cases, and ACS's Division of Family Court Legal Services (FCLS) continues to identify cases that could be resolved with agreements between the parties and then submits them to the court for approval. Attorneys representing parents and children have also provided lists of cases they think are appropriate for resolution, including release of children to the parent or allowing an excluded parent to return to the home, and we have a collaborative approach between ACS divisions and foster care agencies to reach resolutions whenever possible. We have also worked with foster care agencies to ensure that adoption and kinship guardianship cases are ready to proceed as soon as the Court begins hearing these matters. We are advocating for the Family Court to schedule hearings in all

reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship cases. While judicial resolution of permanency issues has slowed dramatically during COVID-19, we stand ready to move these cases forward as soon as Family Court capacity will allow.

Ensuring that youth in foster care are able to participate in remote learning is another top priority for ACS. Starting in Spring 2020, we partnered with the DOE to provide thousands of young people in foster care, including children at the Children's Center and Youth Reception Centers, with remote learning devices. With the start of the new school year, ACS has continued to work closely with DOE staff to expedite delivery for children and youth newly entering care who require devices. ACS and providers have also furnished students with tablets and desktop computers when needed while students are awaiting arrival of their DOE devices.

DOE has also issued a guidance on "Supporting Students in Temporary Housing, Foster Care and ACS-involved Students with Return to School," prioritizing these populations for receipt of remote learning devices and targeting them for outreach and interventions from DOE Community Coordinators, who can assist with targeted service delivery, and Success Mentors, who help understand and develop strategies to resolve attendance challenges.

In addition, ACS and DOE have collaborated to enhance the capacity of foster care agency staff to support students in foster care with remote learning, offering a series of provider trainings on how to assist families in navigating remote learning technology. We have partnered on a series of information sessions about remote learning for foster parents and parents of students in foster care. In both the spring and the fall, ACS and DOE have hosted successful information sessions to both parents and

foster parents, regarding key issues for remote and hybrid learning. Children in foster care have also been prioritized to participate in Learning Bridges, New York City's child care program for children in 3K through 8th grade who were participating in blended learning. Learning Bridges follows all health and safety guidelines and provides an opportunity for children to have a safe, nurturing place to go on their remote learning days.

Children who are in foster care have access to a full continuum of medical and mental health supports, including trauma-informed services. During COVID-19, many of these services have taken place via telehealth delivery to help minimize the spread of the virus. Our foster care provider agencies have provided technology and wifi plans when needed for youth, parents and foster parents to access services and stay connected.

Introduction 148-2018

As I mentioned, stable housing for foster youth who are discharged to independent living is a key focus for ACS and an important priority for our partners who participated in the Task Force. The Committee is hearing Introduction 148-2018 today, sponsored by Chair Levin. The bill would require the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to recognize time spent in foster care as homelessness for the purpose of meeting rental voucher eligibility requirements. ACS and our colleagues at DHS are interested in continuing to work with the sponsor to assist young adults aging out foster care to address their housing needs and to prevent future homelessness. We appreciate the Council's dedication to our shared goal of assuring that older youth in care have access to stable housing resources.

Conclusion

The Interagency Foster Care Task Force was a valuable partnership among key stakeholders to identify important priorities to enhance outcomes for children and youth in foster care. We are truly grateful for the dedication of our partners on the Task Force—and we continue to work closely with them on a number of fronts as we talked about today, even though the Task Force has concluded. We are especially grateful for the focus of Chair Levin and the City Council to help secure resources to advance the Task Force recommendations. While we remain in a time of tremendous budget challenges and an ongoing pandemic, ACS is committed to a continual state of quality improvement and reform, and we will continue to aggressively implement strategies to assure that youth in foster care and their families achieve the best possible outcomes. Thank you to the Council and our other vital partners in this work. We are happy to take your questions.